

CLAIMS:

1. An outer layer comprising a polymer material with an inorganic main chain and having certain visual properties, characterized by a marking (4, 5) formed by at least a region (9; 29; 49) of said outer layer (3; 23; 43) of which at least one of said visual properties is different from the corresponding property of other regions of said outer layer (3; 23; 43), which difference is visible to the human eye.
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2. An outer layer as claimed in claim 1, wherein said at least one region (9; 29; 49) forming said marking (4, 5) is substantially integral with other portions of said outer layer (3; 23; 43).
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3. An outer layer as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein at least one of said visual properties of said at least one region (9; 29; 49) forming said marking (4, 5) is modified through the influence of laser radiation.
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4. An outer layer as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the outer layer (3) is at least dull-translucent.
5. An outer layer as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, formed by a sol-gel process.
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6. An outer layer as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, further comprising filler materials (24) with visual properties of which at least one can be changed by means of a laser.
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7. An outer layer as claimed in claim 6, further comprising fluoridized hydrocarbons.
8. An outer layer as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, comprising at least two layers (50, 51) of polymer material with an inorganic main chain, wherein said at

least two layers are absent, with the exception of at least one layer thereof, in the at least one region (49) which forms said marking.

5 9. An outer layer as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein said inorganic main chain has organic lateral branches.

10. An outer layer as claimed in claim 9, wherein said organic lateral branches comprise methyl groups.

10 11. An element with a carrier structure (2; 22; 42) which support an outer layer (3; 23; 43) as claimed in any one of the preceding claims.

12. An element as claimed in claim 11, wherein the material of the carrier structure (2; 22; 42) is a hard material of permanent shape, such as a metal or a metal alloy, a ceramic material, a glass, or hard plastic.

13. An element as claimed in claim 12, further comprising an anodized layer which supports said outer layer (3; 23; 43).

20 14. An element as claimed in any one of the claims 11 to 13, wherein said outer layer (3) in said at least one region (9) is substantially unchanged in a zone adjoining an outer surface of said outer layer (3) as compared with a zone of surrounding areas of said outer layer (3) which adjoins an outer surface of said outer layer (3).

25 15. A method of marking an outer layer (3; 23; 43) comprising a polymer material with an inorganic main chain and having visual properties, which method comprises the provision of changes visible to the human eye in at least one of said visual properties in at least one region (9; 29; 49) of said outer layer (3; 23; 43), whereby said at least one region (9; 29; 49) forms a visible marking (4, 5) in said outer layer (3; 23; 43) when viewed frontally.

30 16. A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein the outer layer (3; 23; 43) in which said marking (4, 5) is provided was obtained through the application of a sol-gel substance onto a carrier (2; 22; 42) and through the conversion of said sol-gel substance into said polymer material with an inorganic main chain.

17. A method as claimed in claim 16, wherein the sol-gel substance comprises an alkoxy silicate as the monomer for the formation of said polymer material.

5 18. A method as claimed in any one of the claims 15 to 17, wherein said changes in at least one of said visual properties are obtained through a local energy supply to said at least one region (9; 29; 49) which forms said marking (4, 5).

10 19. A method as claimed in claim 18, wherein said local energy supply is provided by a laser beam.

20. A method as claimed in claim 19, wherein a substantial portion of said laser beam penetrates said outer layer (3) and is absorbed by a carrier which supports said outer layer (3).

15 21. A method as claimed in claim 19 or 20, wherein said laser beam is a pulsating laser beam, and wherein the pulsation is carried out with a pulse duration shorter than 30 ns, preferably shorter than 20 ns.

20 22. A method as claimed in claim 19 or 20, wherein said laser beam has a wavelength of between 800 and 1600 nm, preferably between 1000 and 1100 nm.

23. A method as claimed in any one of the claims 19 to 21, wherein the laser has a wavelength at which the outer layer shows a comparatively strong absorption.

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